

SOUTHERN SANDSTONE CODE OF PRACTICE

ESSENTIAL GOOD PRACTICE INFORMATION FOR INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS

- The sandstone outcrops of the Central Weald on the borders of Kent and East Sussex were deposited during the Cretaceous period about 130 million years ago.
- Some of these crags have unique environmental features. Bull's Hollow, Eridge Green, High Rocks and Stone Farm are Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). Climbing is monitored by English Nature which has powers to protect these sites and to ban climbing in the event of damage to the rock or its environment.
- As the only climbable rock close to London, these crags are probably the most heavily used in the country.
- The sandstone is softer than virtually any other climbable rock, and consists of a thin weathered crust over lightly compacted sand. Once the crust has been worn away, rapid erosion occurs.
- Climbs are done using a top rope, or solo. Careful positioning of the climbing rope and belay are necessary as any weighted rope moving over the rock will cause permanent damage.
- To help preserve the fragile sandstone environment, so we can all continue to enjoy the climbing in this area, please follow this code, and encourage others to do so.

THE MOST IMPORTANT POINTS ARE:

- ❖ use a non-stretch belay rope or sling
- ❖ make sure the karabiner hangs over the edge of the crag
- ❖ make sure moving or stretching ropes do not come into contact with the rock
- ❖ walk off when you have finished a climb, do not lower off
- ❖ do not abseil



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PROTECTING THE ROCK

Footwear

1. Wear light soft-soled footwear. If you do not have specialist rock boots, lightweight gym shoes are best. Clean your shoes before starting each climb.

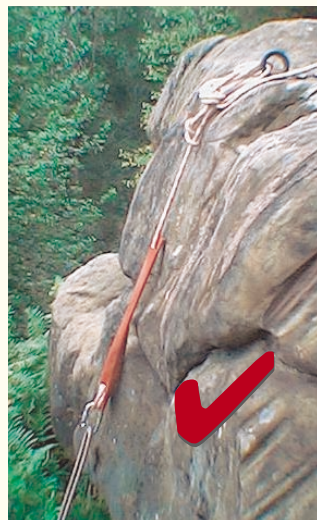
Climbing Style

2. Top-roping and soloing are the only acceptable methods. Do not use pitons, bolts, nuts, camming devices or any sort of leader protection.
3. Choose a climb of the right standard. Please do not spend a long time 'dogging' a climb that is too hard.
4. Please keep the use of chalk to a minimum. Do not use resin powder, which blocks up the pores in the rock and polishes the holds.

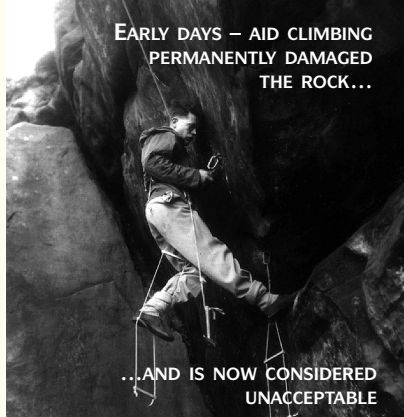
5. Avoid cleaning holds if possible, but if cleaning is essential, do it gently with a soft brush or cloth.
6. The rock is softer when wet. If it is wet, climb carefully and within your standard. Do not pull hard on any sharp hold, and try to stop your feet skidding on sloping holds.
7. Never climb with axes and crampons, even on the rare occasions when ice forms on the rock.

Setting up a Belay

8. At Bowles, Harrison's, Stone Farm and Bulls Hollow, belay anchors have been installed at the top of most climbs. Do not thread the climbing rope through these, but set up a non-stretch belay. It is easiest to use static belay rope of 11mm diameter. 5 metres is a convenient length, and it is also useful to have a longer belay rope of 12 metres when there is no anchor and you are using a tree some distance back from the top of the crag. Putting a permanent sleeve around the knot just above the karabiner helps to protect both the knot and the rock. Belay ropes can be bought from the Warden of Harrison's Rocks. Alternatively, tape slings can be used.



9. When setting up a belay, adjust the height of the karabiner to hang far enough over the edge of the crag so that the climbing rope will not touch the rock.
10. Moving or stretching ropes should never come into contact with the rock. The sawing action destroys the weathered crust and cuts deep grooves in the top of the crag. A static climbing rope is better than a dynamic one.
11. On an isolated buttress, the first member of a party will usually have to solo to the top. Do not throw a rope over the buttress from the ground.



Descending

12. Walk off after completing a climb, do not lower off or abseil.
13. On isolated buttresses all members of a party except the last should down-climb on a slack rope, and the last member should solo down.

Abseiling

14. Please do not abseil at any Southern Sandstone crag. The top of the crag and the fragile holds on the face will be damaged. Abseiling is not permitted by the owners of Eridge Green, Harrison's, High Rocks and Stone Farm.

Malicious Damage

15. Unfortunately this still happens from time to time, for example graffiti, chipping new holds or enlarging existing holds. If you see anyone doing this, please stop them.

PRESERVING THE CRAG ENVIRONMENT

Ground Erosion

16. Use established descent paths. Step on rock rather than earth, and avoid treading on vegetation if possible.

Trees and Vegetation

17. If there is no belay anchor, it is usually necessary to belay to a tree. Tie the belay rope round the tree as low as possible to minimise leverage. Please do not cut down or prune trees.
18. Do not use herbicides for clearing vegetation from the rock. Regrowth will occur and it will be the commonest species that re-colonise, the rare species being eliminated.

Camping

19. Do not camp, bivouac, light fires or stoves near the crags. There is a campsite next to the car-park at Harrison's Rocks.



NOTES FOR LEADERS OF ORGANISED GROUPS

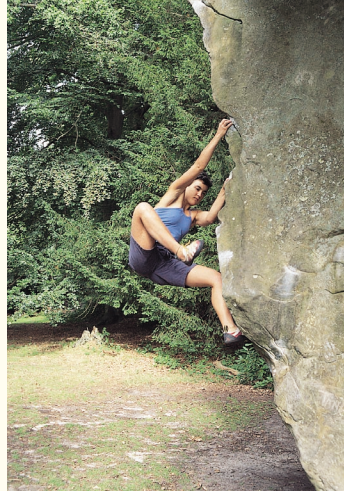
20. Please avoid the most popular climbs at weekends, particularly Sundays. Limit the time your group occupies a climb or a section of the crag. Remove ropes when you have stopped using a climb.
21. Choose climbs to suit the ability of the group. If members are having trouble on a climb their feet will slip repeatedly causing rock erosion. Try something easier.

CRAG SPECIFIC NOTES

22. The Climbers' Club Guide to Southern Sandstone 2005 by Mike Vetterlein and Robin Mazinke details the crags and their access arrangements at the time of publication. Access arrangements may change. Keep up to date by checking climbing magazines or the BMC Access Database.

Bowles Rocks

23. Bowles is owned by an outdoor education trust. Instructors teach students abseiling at the rocks, using only designated areas and taking great care not to damage the rock.
24. There are wire extension anchors at the top of many climbs, but as they do not reach over the edge of the crag, use a belay rope to extend them.



Eridge Green Rocks

25. Eridge Green Rocks is part of a nature reserve owned by the Sussex Wildlife Trust (tel: 01273 492630). The site is of national importance both for its rare mosses, lichens and other lower plants, and for geological reasons. Some plants found here are internationally threatened. It also has archaeological importance.
26. The Trust has negotiated a climbing access agreement with the BMC. Climbing is allowed from Heffalump to Dr Kemp's Cure, from Sandstorm to More Cake for Me, and from Dusk Crack to Tower Girdle inclusive. Climbing outside these zones is forbidden. The area between Sandstorm and More Cake for Me is very sensitive, with many rare plants, so please be extra careful here.
27. Climbing by organised groups is not permitted.

28. Use of chalk is forbidden from Sandstorm to More Cake for Me inclusive. Please use chalk elsewhere as little as possible. Chalk changes the pH of these acid rocks, rather like liming a field, and can seriously damage the lower plants.
29. Do not remove any greenery, whether vegetation or lower plants. When cleaning holds take care only to remove loose sand and debris.
30. The rock at the top of the blocks above the car-park (Equilibrium, etc.) is extremely fragile with deep rope-grooves. Please use a piece of old carpet to protect the rock from the belay rope (which is necessary as the trees are too far back for the use of slings).

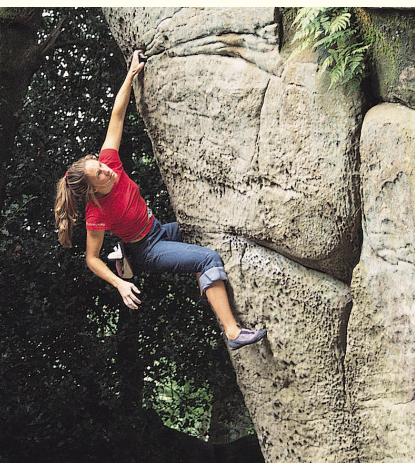
Harrison's Rocks

31. Please approach the crag from the Groombridge entrance. The speed limit on the approach road and in the car-park is 15mph. Park in the car-park and do not obstruct the access road.
32. There are two approaches from the car-park. The lower path, which starts below the toilets, is recommended as this will minimise ground erosion.
33. Please leave a donation towards the upkeep of the Rocks, car-park and facilities on your way out. £1 per vehicle is suggested.

34. If you cannot step across from the top of the Isolated Buttress, there are other ways of getting off after finishing a climb:

Reverse the top traverse of Boulder Bridge Route starting at the top of Crowborough Corner, and scramble across the jammed boulder and up the tree on the other side. This can be protected from the bolt on the north-east corner of the buttress above Wailing Wall.

Or, fix a tight rope from the bolt above Edwards's Effort to the tree in line with the step across. Clip the rope to your harness and use it as a handrail to protect the step. Take a spare 25 metre static rope for this.



Or, and this is the only exception to the 'no abseiling' rule, if you have a disability you may use the bolt at the top of Wailing Wall to abseil into the gully at the back of the buttress between Powder Finger and Bloody Fingers, then ask someone to throw the rope down. Do not pull it down.

35. Visitors needing advice should contact the Harrison's Rocks Warden: Chris Tullis, Evolution Climbing Wall, Plumyfeather Farm, Lye Green, Crowborough TN6 1UX.

Tel: 01892 862924. Mobile 07977 930838 or email: info@evolutionclimbingwall.co.uk

36. Disabled climbers and those responsible for special needs groups are recommended to contact the Warden before their first visit.

High Rocks

37. Advance notice (24 hours) must be given to the manager of the High Rocks Hotel, who can be contacted on 01892 515532.

38. The Hut Boulder may be accessed using a static rope thrown across from the top of the nearest crag. This currently (2005) requires a lot of rope to reach a tree a long way back. An anchor for the access rope on top of the crag near the Boulder is planned.

The first member of a party's climb can then be protected with a shunt or prussik without causing damage. Subsequent climbs are belayed in the normal way from the anchor on the Boulder. The access rope is used with a karabiner as a belay for the last member to down climb on a slack climbing rope, then the access rope is thrown down over the top of the boulder. Do not use the access rope for top rope climbing.



The Sandstone Bouldering Ten Commandments

The following 'commandments' have been adapted from Simon Panton's

North Wales

Bouldering guidebook, and should be taken as the rules by which the future access to, and safeguarding of the Southern Sandstone crags can be assured. We should all learn to

tread a little more lightly, making sure that we leave the crags and boulders - that we love so dearly - as we would like to find them. That means picking up any rubbish that we find, not leaving excessive chalk on the rock and challenging anybody we see wrecking the place.

- 1 No chipping whatsoever. On sandstone, heavy brushing/cleaning can have the same effect.
- 2 No wire or hard nylon brushing. Use a soft nylon brush or a cloth very gently if absolutely necessary.
- 3 Use as little chalk as possible, and only use tick marks when absolutely necessary.
- 4 Gently brush away any excessive build-up of chalk and any tick marks at the end of your session.
- 5 No use of resin (pof).
- 6 No blow torching. If you come across a wet hold, dry it gently with a towel, or come back on a windy day when it will have dried out naturally.
- 7 No gardening of indigenous vegetation.
- 8 Do not leave carpet patches at the crag. Not only are they an eyesore, but they quickly become sodden, and thus useless. They also kill off the vegetation that they cover.
- 9 Use a bouldering pad to decrease the impact on the vegetation at the base of popular problems.
- 10 Do not drop litter at the crag, and take home any that you find.

